



Disappearing Act

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Disappearing Act by alyeskagrace

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Summary:

Mike looked down at the blood on his hands and tried to look tough as he wiped them off on his jeans. Eddie didn't, instead grimacing as he scrubbed them against the back of Richie's shirt, which was already almost soaked and definitely not washing out. Beside them, Bill closed his eyes tightly, gripping the knife in his hand and straightening his spine. An icy whisper against his neck told him he had done this before, in another life, another world, another daydream. He set his jaw tight into place.

"C'mon, guys," He said, his voice not shaking a bit, and Stan thought with a twist in his stomach that he looked like Clark Kent just before he turned into Superman. "Let's kick some alien ass."

1. The Disappearance of Jesse Knight

October 29th, 2016, Derry City Limits, 2:13 a.m.

Humans are complicated, tricky. In some worlds, friends find each other in times of need, and the universe draws ropes between our hearts and keeps us bound together on a collision course that will leave us most either in vast nothingness or endless sorrow. Sometimes tragedy connects us when we are young, when our hearts have not yet hurt, and teaches us how to fight our most essential fears.

Sometimes we are not so lucky. Sometimes tragedy connects us later than it is meant to, and we embark on other stories of heartache and misery. Sometimes friends do not find each other until long after they ought to. Sometimes the universe heals us; sometimes the universe makes us suffer.

Sometimes the universe makes us disappear.

Such is the case of Jesse Knight.

Jesse was seventeen. He liked girls and beer and listening to loud music loudly, screaming along with every song, his brain shaking as he banged his head to the beat. Jesse liked math class and skipping lunch to smoke cigarettes in his truck. He liked this party, right now, with these friends and this stale beer and this feeling in his gut. Most of all, Jesse liked Beverly Marsh.

And Bev liked him, she guessed. *Right now*, she thought, with her hands wrapped around a red cup filled with Bud Light and all the boys and girls she usually hated smiling and laughing around her, *she liked Jesse*. She liked the staleness of him, the normality, the simplicity. She liked drinking cheap beer and wearing Jesse's jacket and talking to Stacy Marron about the football game and not having to think too hard or try too hard or look too hard. Beverly liked - *really liked* - how all of this bullshit stuff made her feel opposite from how she had felt her whole life. For the first time in a very long time, Beverly Marsh did not feel like a loser.

Jesse had stopped her on her way to her car that Friday and asked her what she was doing this weekend. When she answered with the usual “oh, you know, nothing,” he had grinned, wide and ridiculous, just the way she liked, and told her simply that no, she was wrong. She was not doing nothing this weekend. She was, instead, joining Jesse at the absolute banger of the Halloween season: Holden Jennings Carter’s Scare Party.

When they had arrived, Beverly had felt very strange among the keg-standing sweaty boys and the scantily clad beautiful girls. After a while, though, she began to feel much better, realizing that if you didn’t think, and if you drank enough of the “Witch’s Brew” punch, it became a lot easier to stomach Hannah Boll and her thirteen blonde best friends.

By now, though, the party was winding down, and Beverly was shivering in her maybe-boyfriend’s varsity jacket. She suddenly realized she hadn’t seen him in a long while. The alcohol blurred her brain, and she didn’t exactly miss him but felt she should have and walked around the perimeter of Holden Carter’s yard, looking for him. After she passed her third “Slutty Superhero” of the night, she heard him. It sounded like he was laughing (one can’t explain how she knew it was his laugh other than she had heard him laugh that laugh into her bare chest before and at seventeen it was not a laugh she planned on forgetting) somewhere off to her right. She turned and stared into the blackness that extended beyond the trees, suddenly nervous and scared. She tugged on the sleeves of his jacket, trying to cover her freezing fingers. She had just moved to step forward when a terrible light was turned on from somewhere within the forest, somewhere where Jesse had now stopped laughing.

Oh, and now he was screaming. Beverly took off running, ignoring the screams behind her as Slutty Superhero #3 almost fell to the floor in shock. The light was so bright, too bright, and Bev had to squint hard against it, barely able to see a thing but the black shadow of her almost boyfriend against that terrible brightness.

“Bevvie?” He screamed at her, and she realized he was facing her although she couldn’t see his face at all, just the pitch black outline of his body, empty, void. “Bevvie! Bevvie, help! Bev-”

There was a horrible, ear splitting sound. Beverly fell to the ground, every muscle in her body spasming, her palms pressed tight to her ears to try to block it out. The light grew even brighter, if it could, burning white even through her closed eyelids. After a while, she heard a boy's voice, sounding very distant, to the left of her and another to her right, and then the voices surrounded her. They picked her up and carried her gently back to the passenger side of Jesse's truck, and before the blue and red lights had a chance to light up the now-over party, a shaking, sobbing Batman drove her home. Beverly did not cry until 10 minutes in, when she realized that Jesse wasn't behind the mask beside her, when she realized that Jesse couldn't be in the mask beside her, because she realized that Jesse was gone.

October 31st, 2016, Witcham Street, Derry, 7:37 a.m.

Bill wished he was able to wake up like he imagined *normal* kids did, like he knew his friends did, to slowly creak your body into motion as the daylight cast itself inside your window and a song with too much bass faded you into your monotonous existence. Still, this morning just like every morning, Bill was awakened by his younger brother slamming open the door to his bedroom, a frown on his face and his books in his hands. "Come on, Billy! We're gonna be late! Again!"

Bill rolled over, facing Georgie as he stood in his doorway, drool still wet on the edge of his mouth and hair a mess atop his head. "George, for the last time, we are *not* gonna be-

Georgie stomped a single twelve year old foot. "It's 7:40, Billy!"

Jumping out of bed in one fluid movement, Bill didn't take the time to answer back, instead tugging on his pants both legs at a time, a task that almost sent him tumbling to the floor in a mass of limbs and denim. "What- W- Well- Why didn't you *tell* me?" Bill demanded, shaking hands fumbling through his drawers for a clean shirt to wear.

"I did," Georgie said, crossing his arms and holding his books tight to his chest. He had grown up to look a lot more like Bill than either of them realized, his body thin and lanky, his hair falling just into his

eyes the same way Bill's did. They had the same eyes, the same smile (different teeth though, Georgie had just gotten braces in June), the same curve to their spines. Still, Georgie looked at Bill and (even as he smelled his dirty laundry to see what was truly unwearable and what could be salvaged) wanted to be just like him, to have the same squaring of his shoulders and confidence (or was it bravery?) in his eyes. "Also, Richie told me to tell you to fuck off."

Bill frowned as he pulled on a plain black shirt and grabbed a flannel off his dresser. "Gonna tell mom you said that," he threatened, and Georgie gasped a little in spite of himself. Bill rushed past him in the doorway, shoving his phone in his back pocket, leaving Georgie in his wake.

Downstairs, their mother sat drinking coffee in the kitchen. "Georgie-" Bill started, but his little brother had caught up to him and kicked him swiftly in the shin, causing Bill to grunt out the last of his name. Their mother looked up from her crossword, concerned. Seeing only Bill bent over with a bubbling George smiling back, she looked back down to her paper.

"G-Georgie," Bill started again, shoving his little brother's arm, hard. "Is g-gonna need a ride home today. I have, uh..."

"Detention," His mother finished for him. "I remember. Richie's got it, too?"

Bill nodded, grabbing a still-warm muffin off the counter. "And Stan and Eddie and Mike. M-m-maybe Casie could get him?" Bill said, shooting a look over at Georgie as he sighed loudly at the mention of his least favorite cousin.

"Casie? No way! Come on, Mom. What if I just stay in Mr. Long's room during Art Club? I'll get him to call you and tell you it's okay!"

Bill rolled his eyes as his mother slowly nodded. "Okay, George, but you make *sure* he calls me before 2:30. I have to let Casie know by then."

Outside, a horn sounded. Bill quickly grabbed two more muffins as Georgie hurried to the door. "Yes, Mommy! Love you!"

“Love you, Mom,” Bill threw over his shoulder as he ran out the door, just barely beating Georgie to the already running 1999 Volvo out front, where Richie and a brown-haired girl warmed their hands against the air vents. Bill pulled open the passenger door but, seeing a *girl* there, quickly mumbled a sorry and hopped in the back. Georgie stood, mouth half-open, for a moment before Richie winked at him and he tumbled his own way inside.

The girl turned and smiled at them once they were inside, and Georgie smiled back at her. “I’m Hannah,” She told him, holding out a hand for him to shake. He took it, and she grinned wider at his sweaty palm against hers. “And you are?”

“Georgie Denbrough, nice to meet you.”

Next to him, Bill shook his head, looking at his brother incredulously. Then, he turned to her. “Hey, Hannah. W-why are you with R-Richie?”

The girl smiled back, dark green eyes framed by soft bangs and long eyelashes. She was covered in freckles, contrasting against her pale white skin. One of Richie’s cigarettes was tucked behind her ear. She had had a class with Bill last year, an English class where she showed up high and still made the cooler kids pay to cheat off her tests. He thought she was pretty, and interesting, and definitely out of Richie’s league. Richie, the long-haired Hawaiian tourist emo himself, scoffed and shifted the car into reverse. Hannah laughed.

“God only knows,” was her answer, and Bill thought it was good enough. They all rode to Derry Middle (dropping off Georgie) and then Derry High together, laughing and talking the whole way. Richie pressed a combat boot against the gas pedal as hard as he could, silently cursing Bill for being so late and making him drive so horribly in front of such a cute girl. Bill thought Hannah was just as funny as she was smart, and Hannah thought the same about him. They didn’t even notice the words in red flashing across the school’s new electronic sign as they turned into the almost-full parking lot:

ANY INFORMATION REGARDING THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JESSE KNIGHT SHOULD BE REPORTED TO THE DERRY POLICE IMMEDIATELY. CALL (207) 536-8474.

2. An Acquaintance

October 31st, 2016, Derry High School Library, 8:22 a.m.

The Derry High Library never had the same feel for Mike as Derry Public. The Public Library always had some secret hidden behind each worn-down paperback, and the walls were painted a perfect pale yellow that Mike liked to run his fingers along when he was daydreaming. Derry High had loud teenage girls laughing about Bobby from Math and computers that were so old Mike wasn't even sure if they were younger than him or not. The school library had one redeeming feature, though: it was *great* for people watching.

Mike Hanlon had gotten very good at watching people over the years. That's how he had met the boys (Bill, Stan, Richie, and Eddie), anyway. They had been engaging in their signature form of antics (Richie holding Stan's history book above his head and telling him he wouldn't give it back until Stan *fucking apologized* , for what Mike hadn't heard) when Mr. Loughmiller, the freshman gym coach and absolutely the most evil man Mike had ever met in his 17 years of life, made his way over to them. Richie was cursing, every other word out of his mouth a "fuck" or "shit", and Bill still held the pack of cigarettes he and the louder boy had shared in his car during their lunch break. Mike quickly walked up to them and warned them just before Loughmiller called "Tozier? Denbrough?" down the hall, and the boys (somehow) talked their way out of detention. Mike was with them ever since.

This time, though, they had not talked their way out of detention.

It wasn't Mike's fault. Mike knew this, but he still felt a sense of responsibility, the guilt eating at his insides as he ran his fingers down the spines of R. L. Stine in the "Spooky" section of the library. Actual Dickhead of the Year (Henry Bowers) and his band of forgotten toys decided two weeks ago that every time they saw Eddie in the hallway, they would make wheezing noises. Technically, in the school's handbook (and Mike *had* read the school handbook), there was no specific offense that aligned with wheezing at an asthmatic kid, except maybe bullying, but it was damn near impossible to get Principal Howell to do anything about something as little as

“bullying” when almost every day now he was having to do another morning announcement about a missing kid. (And there were so many missing kids now, almost 13, and Jesse Knight had been in Mike’s History 11 class, and Mike had let him copy his homework once, and at this point he hadn’t even known yet that he was missing, but we digress.) So last Friday, Henry had shoved past the boys in the hallway, not too hard but hard enough, wheezing like a maniac and winking at Eddie, and Richie had gotten more than a little pissed off. Henry called them all gay (in worse words), and then Bill got mad because there were girls around, watching, and Eddie and Stan had enough trouble with chicks already, and then because everyone else was mad, Mike was mad, and he hadn’t known exactly how it happened, but Henry Bowers ended up smiling over Timothy Loughmiller’s shoulder as the boys were each told harshly that they would report to detention on that Monday at 3:15, no exceptions.

Richie had to cancel a date with a girl he had told Mike about. Stan’s dad got so mad that he grounded him for a week. Eddie didn’t tell his mom, too scared, instead telling her that he and Mike were going to study at the library after school. Mike had told his grandfather the same. Bill just seemed happy he didn’t have to take Georgie home.

“Excuse me?” A voice called from behind Mike suddenly, drawing him out of his own mind and back into the world. “Um, you’re in my History 11 class, right?”

Mike turned around and shined a polite smile. It was a chubby boy, but he was tall enough (not as tall as Mike’s crazy white boys, but tall enough) with a great smile and kind eyes. Mike remembered him from a project they had done together. “Yep, sure are.”

The other boy grinned back. “Okay, um, well, I’ve missed a few days for, um, personal stuff, and I haven’t even started that research paper that’s due Friday, and I was wondering if you could help me find, uh, books for it and stuff?”

If Richie was here, Mike thought, He would tell this kid that everyone knew that he kicked Patrick Hockstetter’s ass last week and that that’s why he actually missed a few days, not because of “personal stuff.” But Mike was a gentler, softer boy, and he didn’t want to make the kid

uncomfortable. He shrugged. "Sure. I don't have anything better to do." He made his way over to the academic section, and the other boy followed. "What's your name again, by the way?"

"Ben," the boy answered. "Ben Hanscom."

"Well, Ben," and there was a smile in his voice now. "My name's Mike."

They didn't talk much about anything but their teacher's annoying lisp and the paper itself, but Mike thought he liked this kid. He was funny but not overbearingly so, and nice but also healthily nervous, sweaty palms rubbing against each other whenever it got too quiet for him. Mike thought it was kind. It wasn't until Ben had already typed up a thesis and Mike was skimming through paragraphs to find quotes for him that they started really talking, in the way only high school kids do: entirely cluelessly.

"Okay, so my first resource is..." Ben trailed off, and Mike started to answer him.

"Uh..." And he had to pick up a few different books before he found the right one. "A History of the—"

But Ben was grabbing his shoulder and looking down at the Young Adult section with wide eyes. "Shh!" He whispered, but Mike had already shut up, staring the same direction he was. There stood a girl, tall for her age, with long pretty legs and a jacket on that was two sizes too big. *Beverly Marsh*, Mike thought. Bill had had a crush on her when she was in his Biology class. She had always had long, beautiful hair, flowing like fire down her back. Now, suddenly, it was cut short, only a couple inches from her scalp, curling into itself. Ben was barely breathing beside him. Neither of them had to think the words "*she's still pretty*;" they both felt them.

Mike looked back over at Ben, and he was red now, staring down at the computer screen as Beverly looked around her. Mike smiled. It was quiet between them for a moment.

"You know, I have her number if you want it."

Ben looked over at the other boy incredulously. “No way,” he whispered, and Mike laughed a bit under his breath.

“Swear to God,” He said. “My friend Bill got it a while back from someone and never got the guts to text her. I could get it from him if you want.”

Ben’s eyes shifted from Mike to Beverly and back again. He thought, very long and very hard, before shaking his head slowly. “No, it’s not... Not the right time, you know?” Mike nodded. He didn’t know, but he figured he might as well pretend he did. “Did you, uh... Did you hear about Jesse Knight?”

Mike shook his head. A shiver ran down Ben’s spine. “Oh, well, um... Jesse and her used to go out, you know,” He explained, quietly, voice shaking just a bit. “And Friday, uh, they went to that Holden kid’s party and Jesse just... disappeared.”

Mike caught himself just as he was about to gasp, instead choking on air a bit. “Disappeared?” He repeated, and Ben nodded solemnly.

“Yeah. He was there one minute everybody said, and then Beverly went to look for him and he was just... gone.” It was silent between them for a beat, but it was not an uncomfortable silence. Ben was uncomfortable with most silences, but with this guy (*Mike* , he corrected himself in his head), he felt okay, content with the quiet as well as the words shared between them. He seemed like a long-lost friend. After a while, Ben spoke again, turning back to his essay. “So, you know... maybe not the best time.”

Mike finished helping him with his citations just before the bell rang for second period. Ben rushed to grab his things as Mike made his way back over to the front desk, where he had left his backpack. “Well, I have detention after school today, but I’m at the public library almost every other day if you need any more help,” Mike offered.

Ben grinned back at him. “Yeah, sounds great!” Another beat of silence. Someone behind Ben bumped into him as Mike threw his bag over his shoulder. “Why do you have detention?”

Mike frowned a bit. "Bullshit. It's okay, though, all my friends have it today, too."

"Oh," Ben said, nodding slowly and staring at his shoes. "I do, too."

Mike looked back at him, then turned and walked to the door, knowing Ben would follow. It was a move he had picked up from Bill, being the one to walk away first. It kept all the attention on you. Mike liked doing it but didn't get a chance often, since Big Bill almost always led the group anywhere they needed to go. "Hockstetter?" Mike said, quieter now than Ben had been before. Ben nodded. "Okay, well, good," He added, nodding to himself. The other boy felt a warm feeling in his gut, like he imagined people did when their father approved of something they did. It felt like an accomplishment. Mike veered off to the right as Ben made his way to English. "See you in detention then, Ben Hanscom!"

Ben opened his mouth to call back, but an older boy bumped against his back in the hall. By the time he straightened back up, Mike had disappeared into the crowds of teenagers around him. Ben cut his losses and made his way to class, happy enough that he had made at least one friend, even if he couldn't yet convince himself to talk to Beverly Marsh.

October 31st, 2016, Derry City Limits, 9:17 a.m.

On the west side of town, a man named David went for a walk to escape his screaming wife and child. He marched off toward the sunset from his front steps, breathing low in his chest. He pulled a cigarette out from his front shirt pocket and lit it up, smoking with a vengeance as he made his way down the street.

The dirt road led quickly into the woods, away from the small neighbourhood where he lived. Tall, greedy trees blocked his view of the setting sun and canopied over the road. All of a sudden, David became very nervous, fight or flight building in his chest. He took a long drag with shaking fingers and cursed under his breath. It was so quiet to be so early, and he turned to head home then, shaken by the silence of the forest around him.

His wife stared out her kitchen window with a baby on her hip, his small, chubby fingers stuck in the collar of her shirt. "Daddy will be right back, Jackie," she coo'ed, smiling down at the grinning boy. "Daddy will be right back, baby. Promise."

On the edge of the woods just two hundred yards from their front door, she thought she saw the sun peek out from behind the trees, terribly bright for it to be so early. Jackie's daddy never came back.

Notes for the Chapter:

hey guys! i wanna put a lot of headcanons and fun easter egg things in this fic so let me know if you have anything you'd like me to slip in ;-) thanks!!